

Service projects. These CEs are routine and have known impacts and will expedite the planning process to get projects up and running.

To conclude, this is a thoughtful piece of legislation that will do much to help the Forest Service to better do its job. I urge my colleagues to vote "yes."

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015. This is a bipartisan piece of legislation that will address some of the burdensome regulations that have arisen from legal challenges and help get our forests actively managed the way we need.

For some time now we have been concerned about efforts undertaken by extreme environmental groups to twist laws to their liking. The so-called sue and settle strategy has led to policy changes decided by activists and bureaucrats. These policy changes often ignore congressional intent and fail to take into account constituent input and real facts on the ground. Additionally, this means a less transparent and less accountable regulatory process. H.R. 2647 will simplify forest management activities, thereby reducing some of this bad behavior.

The bill also includes an important budgetary fix to help address the rising cost of wildfires. Just this year, the wildfires have burned hundreds of thousands of acres and caused millions of dollars of damage.

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H.R. 2647 will allow access for our land management agencies to the resources they need to fight wildfires without having to rob their other accounts. The current practice of fire borrowing leads to taking away resources from productively managing our forests to keep them healthy and less prone to fire. This bill would end this practice and ensure that agencies have access to the needed resources to fight wildfire disasters all year.

Again, this is much-needed, bipartisan legislation that addresses many of the issues currently impacting forest management. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2647, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM).

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank my colleague from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) for introducing this bill and recognize the hard work done by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees to bring this important bill to the floor.

For too long, failure to properly manage our national forests had led to increased tree mortality from wildfires, droughts, insects, and disease. The Resilient Federal Forests Act gives the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management the tools needed to reverse this trend.

This bill will allow critical forest health projects to move forward by streamlining regulations, will give parishes and counties greater flexibility in how they use forestry revenues, and will ensure Federal agencies have increased access to fund in order to fight and prevent wildfires.

These reforms will put more Americans to work through increased management activities and timber production. It will give money back to our local community for infrastructure and education and will make our forested communities safer by reducing their vulnerability to wildfires.

In my home State of Louisiana, the Kisatchie National Forest covers 604,000 acres, with 382,500 of those acres in my district alone. In all, forestry and the forest products industries accounts for well over 18,000 jobs and over \$1 billion of income in my district.

The people of Louisiana know how valuable well-managed forests are to the health of our State and our economy. I would imagine forested communities throughout the country know this as well.

It is time we start being proactive instead of reactive when it comes to managing our national forests. The Resilient Federal Forests Act will put us back on track to realize the full potential of our forest resources.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. PETERSON. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BENISHEK), a member of the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee.

Mr. BENISHEK. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015.

I represent northern Michigan, which has over 20 million acres of Federal, State, and private forest land. Our forests are a vital part of the economy in northern Michigan that generate over \$16.3 billion per year and creates more than 77,000 jobs. In addition to forestry, the outdoor recreation industry also contributes \$18 billion to Michigan's economy and over 190,000 jobs to our State.

Healthy forests are vital to our way of life in northern Michigan. Like most in my district, I grew up exploring these forests, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling. It is a way of life for so many, not only for those who live up north, but for the millions who visit the forests every year from all around the country.

Sadly, many of our Federal forests are in a state of disrepair these days; they are overgrown, and especially in the Western United States, they are consumed by wildfire.

The Forest Service, which is entrusted with managing 10 percent of the continental United States land base, has identified approximately 58 million acres as being at high risk for

catastrophic fire. Even worse, by conservative estimates, over 56 billion board feet of timber have simply burned away in wildfires on Forest Service lands over the last 10 years.

Over the past 10 years, over a billion dollars of timber rotted on the stump instead of being sold. Those revenues aren't available to the U.S. Treasury. The Forest Service couldn't use the funds to buy seedlings to replant our devastated national forests. We are literally allowing jobs for American families to burn away in our poorly managed Federal lands. Nothing about the current process is working.

H.R. 2647 takes some very simple steps to allow our forests to become healthier and better managed for the future. This bill would streamline timber harvesting on Federal forests in existing land use plans, while reducing the threat of frivolous lawsuits related to forest management.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. WOMACK). The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I yield the gentleman an additional 1 minute.

Mr. BENISHEK. In addition, this legislation would allow States and Federal forests to react faster to catastrophic wildfire events, thereby reducing the future risk to public lands.

Finally, this legislation includes a number of collaborative processes for tribal, State, and private contracting, which will lead to healthier and better managed forests.

I understand that many of my friends here today may live in areas with a few forests or low risk of wildfire. I ask all my colleagues here today, especially those not in heavily forested areas, to listen to your friends from forested districts.

Support this bipartisan, common-sense legislation and help improve the health of our forests.

The Acting CHAIR. The Committee will rise informally.

The Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee) assumed the chair.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate insists upon its amendment to the bill (H.R. 1735) "An Act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes," agrees to a conference requested by the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints the following Members to be the conferees on the part of the Senate: Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. SESSIONS, Mr. WICKER, Ms. AYOTTE, Mrs. FISCHER, Mr. COTTON, Mr. ROUNDS, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. REED (RI), Mr. NELSON, Mr. MANCHIN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. DONNELLY, Ms. HIRONO, and Mr. KAINE.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Committee will resume its sitting.

RESILIENT FEDERAL FORESTS ACT OF 2015

The Committee resumed its sitting.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOH0).

Mr. YOH0. I want to thank the chairmen—Mr. CONAWAY, Mr. THOMPSON, and Mr. BISHOP—for their leadership on this issue.

I stand here today in support of creating more jobs and improving the health of our Nation's forests through sustainable forest management.

H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015, is a bipartisan bill that will address the growing economic and environmental threats to the catastrophic wildfires. This piece of legislation is hugely important for my district and the entire southeastern region of the United States.

Florida is home to a multitude of national forests, including the Apalachicola, Osceola, and Ocala, which span more than 1.2 million acres in north central Florida. These forests supply over 10,000 acres per year for timber production, creating jobs, lumber products, pellet mills for green energy, and paper products.

This land also allows for recreational activities like equestrian and motorcycle trails and hunting and fishing. In addition, they produce roughly 600 billion gallons of fresh water, and that is all in my home State.

Due to a lack of proper forest management, the risk of catastrophic wildfires has increased dramatically. These emergencies draw critical funding away from the Bureau of Land Management accounts intended to prevent wildfires, thus creating a chronic problem that is only getting worse.

This bill ends that inefficiency by allowing FEMA to transfer funds to the Forest Service when these disasters occur, ensuring activities like prescribed burns and other management techniques are adequately funded.

This bill improves management practices, helps prevent wildfires, and should be supported by every Member in this Chamber.

Again, I commend Chairmen CONAWAY, THOMPSON, and BISHOP.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA), chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Chairman, first, let me thank the chairmen of the Natural Resources and Agriculture Committees for working with our committee on title IX of the bill.

Title IX authorizes the President to declare a major disaster for wildfires on Federal lands and provide assistance to the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture for extraordinary wildfire suppression costs in excess of the 10-year average. These provisions protect FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund and preserve FEMA's wildfire assistance that is currently available to State, local, and tribal governments through the Stafford Act.

Because this provision was not included in the reported bill, a legislative history document has been developed to articulate the congressional intent for title IX, as well as how it is expected to be implemented.

Mr. Chairman, I will insert this legislative history document into the RECORD.

(Chairman Bill Shuster, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, July 9, 2015)

H.R. 2647: RESILIENT FEDERAL FORESTS ACT OF 2015, TITLE IX—MAJOR DISASTER FOR WILDFIRE ON FEDERAL LAND

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Definition of "Major Disaster": By bifurcating the definition of "Major Disaster" in the Stafford Act, the Committee preserves the existing definition, and the programs that flow therefrom, and adds an additional definition for "Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Land," for which a separate and distinct declaration, process and assistance have been established pursuant to the new Title VIII of the Stafford Act. "Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Land" meets the definition "disaster relief" pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(D) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

Request for Declaration of a Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Land: There are four distinct requirements that must be met before the President may issue a declaration for a major disaster for wildfire on federal land.

(1) Each request must be made in writing by the Secretary making the request on behalf of that Department.

(2) The requesting Secretary must certify that in that current fiscal year, the Department's wildfire suppression operations account received no less than an amount equal to the 10-year average. This amount cannot include any carry over from previous years and must include any rescissions or reductions. Also, future 10-year averages must take into account the total amount expended on wildfire suppression, including appropriations and assistance provided under Title VIII of the Stafford Act.

(3) The requesting Secretary must certify that all funds available for wildfire suppression operations will be obligated within 30 days and there are wildfires on federal lands continuing to burn that will require firefighting beyond the resources currently available.

(4) The requesting Secretary must request a specific amount which is the estimate of funds needed to address the current wildfires on federal lands.

The Committee does not intend for the respective Secretary to have to make a request for each fire they anticipate will exceed the wildfire suppression operations appropriations. As the definition for "Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Lands" includes "wildfire or wildfires", it is intended that the respective Secretary's request will include all known fires that will require extraordinary resources beyond those remain-

ing in the wildfire suppression operations account of that specific federal land management agency. Each Secretary will make a request for the resources required by that particular department.

Assistance Available for a Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Land: The only assistance available for a declaration of a major disaster for wildfire on federal land is the transfer of available funds from a new account established for these purposes to the requesting Secretary in the amount requested.

The Committee intends for the funds appropriated into the new account established by the President for major disaster for wildfire on federal land assistance will be designated by Congress as being for disaster relief pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(D) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

The declaration and assistance available for a major disaster for wildfire on federal lands are based on the existing major disaster declaration process delegated by the President to be administered by the FEMA Administrator. The Committee expects the process for a major disaster for wildfire on federal land will be managed in a similar manner through a delegation of the President's authority to the FEMA Administrator. Further, the Committee expects that the account established by the President for a major disaster for wildfire on federal land will be a dedicated sub-account of FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. However, pursuant to the legislative language, none of these funds can be commingled or transferred between these accounts.

Once assistance is transferred to the Department of the Interior or the Department of Agriculture, it is not required that the assistance be used only for those wildfires identified in the request. The assistance may be used for wildfires that begin after the declaration or were not identified in the request. Funds transferred may be used for all wildfire suppression operations eligible activities. The Committee anticipates these will be no year funds, available until exhausted.

It is entirely foreseeable that a wildfire that begins on or severely impacts federal lands requiring assistance under Title VIII of the Stafford Act could continue to grow, impacting state, local, tribal governments and certain non-profit properties and infrastructure. The provision of assistance under Title VIII of the Stafford Act in no way impacts the ability of state, local and tribal governments and certain non-profits to apply for assistance under FEMA's other disaster programs, if eligible, including the Fire Management Assistance Grant Program, an emergency declaration, or a traditional major disaster declaration.

Prohibition on Transfers: No longer can the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture borrow from non-fire suppression accounts to fund the extraordinary needs of wildfire suppression operations.

SECTION-BY-SECTION

Section 901. Wildfire on Federal Lands: This section defines a major disaster for wildfire on federal lands.

Section 902. Declaration of a Major Disaster for Wildfire on Federal Lands: This section establishes the procedure for requesting a declaration of a major disaster for wildfire on federal lands and provides for assistance.

Section 903. Prohibition on Transfers: This section prohibits the transfer of funds between wildfire suppression accounts and other accounts not used to cover the cost of wildfire suppression operations.

Mr. BARLETTA. After watching the floodwaters of Hurricane Irene and